

## COLONIAL HEGEMONY OF POST-INDEPENDENCE INDIA IN ARUNDHATI ROY'S THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

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*The American way of life is not sustainable.  
It doesn't acknowledge that there is a world beyond America.*

Arundhati Roy

### ABSTRACT

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru argues in his *The Discovery of India*, "Which of these two Englands came to India? The England of Shakespeare and Milton, of noble speech and writing and brave deed... or the England of the savage penal code and brutal behaviour, of entrenched feudalism and reaction?" (285). Rama Sharma believes that without doubt we had the England of the savage penal code during the British regime, but now we have the great England of Shakespeare and Milton shaping the Commonwealth authors in shaping a new literature that confluences cultures of the East and the West. For V.S. Naipaul, the continued exercise of English in India for creative and other purposes is mimicry of the West and an "act of self violation." The consciousness of assimilating cultures and of enriching each other's cultural growth through such a merger is very much to the liking of the Indian English novelists. Chacko, the Rhodes Scholar, who married and divorced the English girl Margaret Kochamma and Margaret's remarriage with Joe, her revisit to Ayemenem along with the biological daughter of Chacko, Sophie Mol, her brief stay with Estha and Rahel are the glaring instances of the east's encounter with the western counterpart. The three-suited imperial entomologist Pappachi, England-born, Margaret-married-Chacko, Father Mulligan-fanatic Baby Kochamma and The Sound of Music- relishing children are noted for their western mania. Roy's questioning of the established love-laws that led to the victimization of the innocent Velutha, the deep-rooted caste system, the Marxist-ideology entrenched Velutha and the western-visionary Ammu who crossed the love-laws for which the East had punished them severely are discussed in this chapter.

**KEYWORDS:** Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things*, Booker & Post Colonialism

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### INTRODUCTION

Fanon observes in his *Black Skin, White Masks* the racial superiority of the white over the non-white people which has created a sense of division and alienation in the self-identity of the colonized people. The history, culture, language, customs and beliefs of the white colonizers are imposed on the colonized and it has made them to believe that the culture of the colonisers is universal and superior to the indigenous culture. This creates a sense of inferiority in the colonized subjects leading to the adoption of the language, culture and customs of the former rulers.

### Clash of Values

Arundhati Roy casts a penetrating look at the clash of values between the East and the West. The theme of synthesizing the cultures of the east and the west figure dominantly and the Indian characters strongly react to the western characters and transform themselves to a larger extent. The three-suit wearing imperial entomologist Pappachi, England-born, Margaret-married-Chacko, Father Mulligan-fanatic Baby Kochamma and *The Sound of Music*-relishing children are noted for their western outlook. It discloses the inevitability the influences of colonization, whose victims remain trapped. Roy also delineates the way in which the Indian Returnees look at Indians from the western eyes. This novel is set in Ayemenem, Kerala, and the remnant of the colonial ideology that persuades to shape the personality of the characters. Ranga Rao considers that the story of *The God of Small Things* is about “an Indian village, authentic India; but, the sensibility is urban, westernised, and modern.”

### Struggle for Cultural Cohesion and Moral Stability

*The God of Small Things* is the family saga of three generations and it presents the kaleidoscopic characters struggling for cultural cohesion and moral stability. Estha and Rahel belong to the youngest generation. Their mother Ammu and uncle Chacko represent the preceding generation and their grandparents Pappachi and Mammachi belong to the oldest generation. Pappachi started his career as an imperial entomologist in the British government and continued his service as Joint Director of Entomology in the post-independence India. His three-piece suits, blue Plymouth and the Vienna diploma persuade Ammu to call him as an ‘incurable British C.C.P.,’ which in Hindi means a shit-wiper. Baby Kochamma survived with all these three generations.

Roy presents the Indian culture and religion as appealing as that of the West. India, chiefly because of her ancient cultural heritage attracts many Europeans. Western writers like Max Muller praised India for her rich spiritual wealth. Chacko, the Oxford scholar meets Margaret Kochamma, an English waitress in a restaurant in England and developed his relationship with her. Margaret looks at Chacko and wonders whether he is an embodiment of oriental wisdom:

She had never before met a man who spoke of the world—of what it was, and how it came to be, or what he thought would become of it—in the way in which other men she knew discussed their jobs, their friends or their weekends at the beach. Being with Chacko made Margaret Kochamma feel as though her soul had escaped from the narrow confines of her island country into the vast, extravagant spaces of his. (GST 245).

### Withering of Student Charm

But Margaret’s observation of Chacko’s ‘studently charm’ withered within a year, and so she developed contempt towards him that caused to go for a divorce. She remarried Joe, who was everything that Chacko wasn’t. Even after the divorce, Chacko spoke of Margaret with a peculiar pride. They wrote to each other frequently, updating the intelligence of Sophie. Margaret admitted that Joe was a wonderful and caring father that made Chacko to feel joyous and sorrowful in equal measures. He loftily admits that Margaret had taken the right decision of divorcing him for a better match. Over the years, their relationship becomes matured and the friendship continued. Margaret still thought of herself as an ordinary woman and Chacko an extraordinary man. On hearing the death of Joe, Chacko is heart-broken and invites her along with Sophie to spend the Christmas vacation at Ayemenem in India. His introduction of Margaret to his relatives exhibits his colonial mentality, “My wife, Margaret” (GST 142), but Margaret corrected him to say as “ex-wife.” One could easily find that Chacko was “a proud and happy man to have had a wife like Margaret. White” (GST 142). His wife Margaret and daughter

Sophie append to him like a recently won pair of trophies.

### **Chacko's Protest against Inbreeding**

Chacko's room was stacked with a lot of books. He reads everything and often cites long passages from the books for no apparent reason. For instance, one morning when he drove out, he suddenly said, "Gatsby turned out all right" (GST 38). Though Chacko is enamoured of the western life style, its glitter and show, it makes him to protest the existing social values in India, especially in Kerala. He protests against 'inbreeding' and against Comrade Pillai's suggestion of sacking Velutha, that according to Pillai, "the caste issues are very deep-rooted" (GST 278), whereas Chacko dismisses the issue as 'nonsense'.

### **Ammu – a Blind Supporter of the West**

Though Ammu has a liking for western classics and etiquette, she proves that she is not a blind supporter of the West. Chacko mentions colonialism as the worst sort of war that creates the Indians to 'adore our conquerors.' Ammu replied "Marry our conquerors is more like that" (GST 53). The western streak in Ammu was the result of her modern outlook and independent thinking. Chacko demands an apology from Ammu for her sarcastic reply to one of Margaret's questions, but she refused to apologize.

Ammu taught western etiquette to Estha, "When someone says how do you do? You are not supposed to say 'fine, thank you' but 'how do You Do?'" To the disappointment of Estha, when he says how do you do to Sophie, she replied, "just like a laddoo one piece two" (GST 150). Sophie said that she had learnt it from her Pakistani classmate friend. As Roy belongs to such a western pocket in urban India, she could caricature them vividly.

### **Estha and Rahel, and Elvis Presely**

Estha and Rahel represent the youngest generation and they were raised in a western atmosphere with western classics, movies, music and cartoons. They respected Elvis Presely, delighted with *The Sound of Music* and *Pop Eye, the Sailor* and quotes from English classics like *Julius Caesar*. English becomes the language of high class so that Comrade Pillai asks his son Lenin to recite Caesar's final speech, to Chacko. Even in the Marxist Party song, "the chorus was in English, the rest of it in Malayalam" (GST 269) which proves that the Communists, who voice for the working class are also not free from western charm. Estha had Elvis Presley puff and curls up his lips like Elvis. He recites songs from *The Sound of Music*. With a sheet wrapped around him, Estha crashes on the bed as a corpse saying, "Et tu? Brute? Then fall Caesar" (GST 83) for several times that forecast his betrayal of Velutha. Abu Baker regards the children's backward reading as "another way of expressing the desire for erasure and implies that life can only be understood backwards, in retrospect" (242).

### **Baby Kochamma and the European Father Mulligan**

Baby Kochamma was deeming her social identity by being infatuated with an European priest Father Mulligan. As she fails in her attempt, she relinquishes her religion and gets converted into a Roman Catholic to allure him or at least to be closer to him. She couldn't tolerate the missionary life and so decides to take a diploma in ornamental gardening at the University of Rochester. She returns Ayemenem to spend the rest of her life as an elderly and obese spinster aunt. Her careful preparation to welcome Margaret and Sophie shows her inclination towards the West.

Father Mulligan visits Kerala to study Hindu scriptures, so that he can skillfully defend Christianity. On the contrary, he is enthralled by the Vaishnava and so he gets converted into a Hindu and spends his last years in an ashram at

Rishikesh. Baby Kochamma is deeply offended by his act. Yet she continues to write every night, year after year, in a diary after diary “I love you... I love you.” After Father Mulligan’s death, Baby Kochamma

Stripped his ridiculous saffron robes and re-clothed him in the Coca-Cola cassock she so loved. She snatched away his begging bowl, pedicured his horny Hindu soles and gave him back his comfortable sandals. She re-converted him into the high-stepping camel that came to lunch on Thursdays. (GST 298).

### **Admiration for Anglophile**

Roy mocks at the behaviour of the westernized Indians, who attempt to be more English than the actual English people. During the entire week of Sophie’s stay in Ayemenem house, Baby Kochamma keenly observed Estha and Rahel if they were speaking in Malayalam. She levied a small fine on them and made them to write imposition of “I will always speak in English. A hundred times each” (GST 36). She trained them to sing the song, “Rej-Oice in the Lo-Ord,” on the arrival of Sophie, and takes care with their “prer NUN seaayshun.” Roy puts forth the reason that Margaret Kochamma attempts to set herself “apart from the sweeper class” (GST 138). After the entry of Margaret and Sophie into Ayemenem, she develops “a strange new British accent” (GST 144) and reminds “Ariel” to Sophie. Shakespeare’s play *The Tempest* appeals to the colonial discourse as Prospero symbolises the rulers, who governed and controls Caliban’s island and attempts to civilise him like Joseph Conrad’s Kurtz. Abu Baker thinks by analogy, “the Indian is Caliban who is subjected to a similar civilising mission by the English” (239).

Baby Kochamma constantly disparages Hinduism and dislikes Rahel and Estha not for the reason that they are doomed fatherless wail, but, “they were Half-Hindu Hybrids whom no self-respecting Syrian Christian would ever marry” (GST, 45). She is of the view that “these Hindus...have no sense of privacy” (GST 86). Her watching of “blondes , wars, famines, football, sex, music, coups d’etat...American NBA league games, one-day cricket and all the Grand Slam tennis tournaments” (GST 27) from the newly installed dish antenna illustrates her fascination for the West.

### **Sophie – the Western Angel**

The admiration for the hated and bell-bottomed Sophie, presentation of a cake with the inscription ‘Welcome home, Our Sophie Mol’ and Baby Kochamma’s addressing of Sophie as “little angel” are the other examples for the colonial mindset of Ipe family. Estha and Rahel were craving for love and affection from their maternal uncle Chacko. But he ignored them and showered his love on Sophie, who loves her British step-father Joe. Mammachi looked at the red-brown hair and blue-gray blue eyes of Sophie like reading a cheque.

### **India - Heart of Darkness**

Prior to leaving England, Margaret’s English colleagues suggested her to take everything from England and created an image that India is a “heart of darkness” (GST 267). But, Sophie Mol mingled freely with Estha and Rahel and presented those gifts like chocolates, socks, pens and multicoloured toes.

Margaret Kochamma slaps Estha on the occasion of the death of Sophie, but she tenders an apology to Estha before departing India. The west-obsessed Baby Kochamma doesn’t respect the emotions of Estha and Rahel, and even never regrets for her act of being the reason for the death of Velutha and Ammu and the separation of the twins. The western educated Chacko who couldn’t run even the pickle factory successfully was also insensitive to the emotions of others. Compared to Velutha’s munificence Chacko is a nobody. After the tragedy of Sophie’s drowning, Chacko ordered

Ammu to leave the house immediately. But Velutha was sensitive to the trio – Estha, Rahel and Sophie Mol, who were received by him with utmost courtesy. He addressed them as Mrs. Pillai, Mrs. Eapen and Mrs. Rajagopalan, treated them generously by providing with fresh coconut water to drink and presented little wooden spoons.

### **Cultural Clash in Marriage**

Marriage plays an important role in the lives of Indians. In the western culture, the core importance is laid on the individuals rather than any attempt to appease their relations and society. They aim at making themselves happy rather than considering living for others. They themselves choose their life partners and are not pressurized by their parents. But in India, one has to marry keeping in view his society, parents and relatives first and finally for himself or herself. If one is not happy with the married life, he or she cannot be separated easily. The importance of arranged marriage in Indian culture is also stressed by Aravind Adiga in *The White Tiger*, where the Mongoose, Ashok's brother, who insisted that Ashok should remarry.

### **Marriage – a Lifelong Relationship?**

Divorce is the major western influence encountered in this novel. Though India ranks at the lowest level seen worldwide, the prevalence of divorce in India is getting increased. The divorce rate in urban India is higher than that of Indian villages. Statistics show that one out of hundred Indian marriages ends up in a divorce which is pretty little in comparison to America's fifty per cent of marriages turning unhappy. However the year 2013 has witnessed 43,000 divorces across the country.

India is noted for its joint family system, which started to disappear in the recent times. It is the major reason for the family break ups. "Most of those splitting up are members of India's thriving, urban middle class whose lives have been transformed by India's boom, and whose aspirations are radically different from those of their parents and grandparents," says Geetanjali Sharma, a marriage counsellor in India. Now a days, like the wedding henna, marriages in India are not always permanent, Geetanjali said sarcastically. The Indian males want their wives to be progressive, but at the same time they expect their wives to do the entire household works for them. Presently divorce has become a socially acceptable form in India. Even the government of India is likely to amend the existing marriage law to waive off or reduce the "cooling-off period," of eighteen months to six.

Even Aravind Adiga regards that marriage is a good institution. But the problem in India is "everything's coming apart in this country. Families, marriages –everything" (WT 215). For the first generation people like Pappachi and Mammachi the idea of divorce seemed exotic. So Mammachi's marital life was spent with the flower-vase beating of Pappachi. She gave up her extraordinary talent of playing violin by the compulsion of her husband and remained as an angel in the house. Even the judge Jemu didn't think of divorcing Nimi, but simply sent his wife to her parent's home.

In the second generation, Ammu, Chacko and Ashok are the divorcees and in all these cases, it is the decision of the women that leads to the separation. Moreover they don't make any attempt to reconcile, but sometimes, they regret for their breakup. Though Ammu's decision of divorcing Babu is justifiable, the act of Margaret and Pinky seem to be unpalatable to the Indian mentality. Margaret asked for divorce when she was on her family way, as she found everything she expected in Joe that was not in Chacko. Yet, Chacko is proud of Margaret for having divorced him. Ammu's modern outlook makes her to challenge the social order in marrying a man of her choice and then breaking from him and developing a relationship with an untouchable labourer of their pickle factory, Velutha.

In the third generation, Rahel's divorce from Larry McCaslin appears to have no apparent reason. Her conjugal life didn't blossom as her husband was offended by her eyes. He behaved as if she belonged to someone else, resulting in the broken marriage and divorce. When Pillai asked Rahel about her family, she casually remarked without remorse that she was a divorcee. Their separation appears to have no significance. Pillai exclaimed, "Die-vorced?" as if it were a form of death. Here, Roy presents the steady acceptance of the western views over the three generations.

### **Impact of west on Indian Arts and Culture**

Roy is unhappy about the response of the western audience to the eastern art over the truncated version of the Kathakali dance from three hours to one hour. They were coerced to cut short the Kathakali show, so as to suit the taste of the Western tourists. The Kathakali men's painful acceptance and their performance are revealed in Roy's narration of their "darned skirt and the balding velvet blouse" (GST 231). Moreover, the historical building like the "History House" is turned into a star hotel to lure the foreign tourists. It is another example of the erosion of eastern culture by the West. Adiga also ridicules the American tourist's pompous notion on the Indian religion and culture. They visit the religiously significant places in India like Hardwar or Benaras just to take photographs of naked sadhus and discuss the pollution of the Ganga River. In front of the five star hotels, a man with a waxed moustache and beard, wearing a ridiculous red circus turban would be standing, with whom the American tourists want to take a photo.

### **Love Laws**

Roy questions the established love-laws that led to the victimization of the innocent Velutha. In the deep-rooted caste system in India, the love of Ammu and Velutha is the prime force. The Marxist-ideology imbibed Velutha and the western-visionary Ammu to cross the love-laws for which the East had punished them severely.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

In both *The God of Small Things* and *The White Tiger*, the Indian men marry European girls and their marriages don't go in harmony, because of the lack of understanding between the Indian husbands and their western counterparts, and each of them had their own disappointments and unfulfilled desires. The difference in customs, attitudes and living habits of the differently cultured people result in a discord. If a man wishes to be free, it should also be a women's prerogative. The European wives and Indian husbands couldn't maintain harmonic relationship without a clash of personalities. The dissimilar life-styles of the East and the West lead to disputes that naturally lead to separation. Ashok feels throughout the novel that he has been trapped into an unhappy relationship. In the end, Pinky leaves without informing him.

Adiga draws the attention of the readers to the problems of the couples united in a mixed marriage. Ashok and Pinky face greater difficulty in adjusting themselves that they belong to diverse backgrounds and their life style is different. Most important, they do not take steps to arrive at an agreement and a mutual understanding is continually put off by each other's drawbacks. As a result, the initial attraction is lost and so there is no common ground left for interaction. The different characteristics that attract the East and the West become so intolerable that they are unable to live together.

Salman Rushdie, other notable Booker awardees too draws a similar line of satirical portrayal in his *Imaginary Homeland*, "how fine was the manner of its [the imperialism's] setting; in what good order the British withdrew. Union jacks fluttered down their poles all round the world, to be replaced by other flags, in all manner of outlandish colours. The pink conquers crept home, the boxwallahs and memashibs and bwanas, leaving behind them parliaments, schools, Grand Trunk Roads and the rules of cricket" (129).

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